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TRANSLATION

Why Translation  
Studies Matters

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# Why Translation Studies Matters

*Edited by*

Daniel Gile

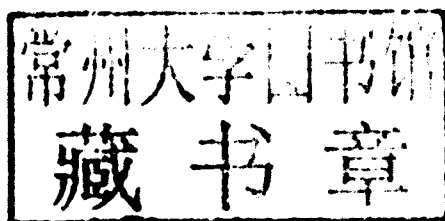
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#### **Volume 88 (Volume 6 in the EST Subseries)**

Why Translation Studies Matters

Edited by Daniel Gile, Gyde Hansen and Nike K. Pokorn

## Preface

This volume is a collection of papers around the theme “Why Translation Studies matters”. Some authors address the topic explicitly and point to contributions to training, to translation practice, to society at large, to other disciplines. Others prefer to focus on particular aspects of Translation, Translator training or Translation Studies, leaving it to the readers to identify the contribution of TS on the basis of the studies presented.

The first paper, by Franz Pöchhacker, is one of the few which focus on the theme from a wide, comprehensive angle. It refers explicitly to Interpreting Studies, but applies equally well to Translation Studies as a whole. Pöchhacker argues that the existence of a separate body devoted to Interpreting Studies meets an epistemological need. He defines the “market” for IS, starting with interpreter training, moving on to the IS community and to practitioners of interpreting. He highlights the potential importance of IS to the community interpreting environment and suggests that interpreting scholars could help make IS more meaningful by stressing ‘development’, inter alia by participating in interdisciplinary committees which could improve the working environment of interpreters. This idea is also taken up by Kaisa Koskinen, who also expresses her opinions on the desirable contribution of TS. Her paper is an example of interdisciplinary import: she refers to ideas from sociologist Michael Burawoy, who divided sociology into a two-by-two matrix showing the four possible combinations of types of audience (“academic” vs. “non-academic”) and knowledge (“instrumental” vs. “reflexive”). She takes this matrix as a source of inspiration for her own reflection, explains that Translation scholars have not addressed sufficiently the non-academic audience and joins Pöchhacker in calling for direct, active engagement of TS in society.

While such active intervention may help TS matter more, by essence, scholarly activity is primarily about exploring. Various papers in this collective volume explore the role and position of Translation in society. Here, TS attempts to discuss and reveal the underlying hegemonic structures that find their expression in a particular translation practice, and thus provides an insight into the position of the translator, translation or particular genres in the observed society.

In his contribution, David Limon says that translators are increasingly referred to as “cultural mediators” – which implies an active intervention in the communication process beyond the conduit model – but finds that in the field, they do not necessarily play such a role. He illustrates this with the example of translations of texts about Karst, a type of limestone which plays a role in the natural heritage of Slovenia. He finds that in English translations of such texts there is no cultural explication. Limon speculates

about the reasons and suggests *inter alia* that raising the translators' status would help empower them to intervene more actively as cultural mediators in their work.

Carmen Camus Camus looks at another aspect of social constraints on translation, in this case censorship in Spain during Franco's period. She examines the censorship files regarding Western narrative texts, which were very popular in Spain during that period, including both translations and pseudo-translations, and provides information on publications during various phases of Franco's regime, including the 1946 Book promotion law and the subsequent economic incentives given by the Spanish government to the publication of Western narratives. She concludes with examples of censorship on texts which she analyzes.

On the other side of the political spectrum, Nike K. Pokorn analyzes the influence of self-censorship in a Socialist country. Her research covers the translation of children's literature in Slovenia from 1945 to 1963. The case study presented in her paper focuses on Felix Salten's *Bambi*. The one aspect she chooses to highlight here is self-triggered attenuation of religious overtones in the translation of the last passages of the story, which, she argues, is found throughout translations of juvenile literature and reflects the attitude of communism towards the Judeo-Christian paradigm at the time.

Another type of literature, namely crime fiction, is studied by Yvonne Lindqvist, with a literary polysystem-oriented analysis and a comparison of British, Swedish and French translations of José Carlos Somoza's *La caverna de las ideas*. Lindqvist says that the English translation was the most manipulated of the three, and that this is due to differences in the position of translated texts within the three literary systems, the English system being more closed and requiring more information in the translation. She concludes that studies with both micro-level and macro-level components could help gain more insight into the translator's habitus.

Hanna Risku, Angela Dickinson and Richard Pircher's paper takes a more economic view of the role of translation in society in terms of knowledge production and sharing as an economic asset. They discuss approaches to Knowledge Management and then go on to present translators as knowledge experts who generate intellectual capital and are good communicators. They look at KM instruments for codifiable and non-codifiable aspects of knowledge required for translation. They conclude that both translation and Translation Studies are relevant to companies as producers and sharers of intellectual capital which can add value to their organizations' production, but that they are also relevant to society at large, *inter alia* in terms of intercultural communication.

Translation is about knowledge, but obviously also about language. TS can help reveal the forces that shape different language policies, the position of particular languages in given societies as well as linguistic change. Several contributions in this volume focus on language issues, starting with Mary Snell-Hornby's paper on globalization and English. While the existence of a *lingua franca* can be seen as a positive factor which facilitates communication, Snell-Hornby highlights limitations and drawbacks in the increasing use of less-than-perfect English for academic exchanges worldwide.

Listeners sometimes find it difficult to follow non-native speakers taking the floor in English, and scholars with no English have no chance to participate in many debates. Snell-Hornby proposes that no single natural language should monopolize global communication in TS and is in favour of passive knowledge (understanding, as opposed to producing) of several languages, as well as the use of bridge languages for better communication.

The concept of bridge languages is precisely the focus of Martina Vankúšová's contribution, which addresses the specific case of translation and interpreting for the European Union where a large percentage of translations are done from Euro-English into other languages – but problems may arise with occasional use of non-English. Bridge-languages could help individuals communicate with speakers of other related languages. While there are solutions for Romance languages (French) and for Germanic languages (English), the situation is more difficult for Slavonic languages. Russian is considered unsuitable, if only because of its use of the Cyrillic script. Slovakian and Slovenian are other possibilities.

Hebrew is the main language in Israel. It is understood and used actively by all, but strong minority languages which the mass media use include Arabic and Russian. On the other hand, English has also permeated strongly Israeli society. This intense interpenetration of several linguistic systems in a small population raises interesting questions for sociolinguists with respect to national identity and the integration of minorities. Rachel Weissbrod argues that Translation Studies could benefit from closer scrutiny of phenomena around multilingualism in the media, and suggests that, conversely, TS can provide insights into the construction of social identity in a multicultural society.

Moving from language and society to language in translation, Marija Zlatnar Moe studies language shifts in the translation of popular fiction texts into Slovene. In her sample of translations of seven books from different genres, she finds a general trend towards a more neutral, unmarked formal register which does not reflect the style of the original. She argues that this can make a well-written book uninteresting and disappointing to readers who do not have access to the source language. By highlighting such phenomena, TS could help make society at large aware of the risks associated with poor translation. Beyond awareness-raising, it could look at the reasons behind the losses and perhaps help find some remedies, especially in translator training.

Ian Williams proposes a corpus-based approach and methodology to look at linguistic profiles of texts. When comparing such texts in source- and target languages, regular but subtle differences in collocation, colligation, semantic and semantic prosody preferences which can well go unnoticed in traditional human observation can be identified and quantified, and thus provide input for possible improvement of translation. The method, called Application of Corpus-based Contrastive Evaluation for Natural Translation (ACCENT), is illustrated by a comparison of the use of the first person verb use in English and Spanish biomedical research papers.

A paper with direct applications for translator training is offered by Dieter Hermann Schmitz, who looks at the problem of translating names of organizations. More specifically, he reflects on his daily practice as a translator trainer involved in the translation of Finnish radio broadcasts at his university in Tampere into German. Taking the name of a Finnish industrial association as a starting point, he shows that literal translation of such names may not be a good solution, discusses possible options and formulates general strategies for the translation of names.

Training and translation assessment are the focus of the following section of the book. Heloísa Pezza Cintrão discusses the role of theory in translator training. She offers data from a case study where concepts from functional theory, from text linguistics and from cognitive research into inferencing processes and problem-solving were presented to students at an introductory class. A controlled experiment was designed to test the effect of such awareness-raising through theoretical concepts on actual translation performance. Findings suggest that presenting declarative knowledge about translation-related theoretical elements does contribute to the students' progress, and rather rapidly at that.

Introducing theoretical concepts is one potential way to accelerate learning. Another is a short internship-like experience. Magdalena Bartłomiejczyk reports on the results of such an operation, organized for her conference interpreting students. Students interpreted simultaneously at a real conference in silent booths (no output was available to delegates) for a total number of hours roughly equivalent to a term and a half in the booth at their university. A before-after experiment done on a set of two English speeches to be interpreted into Polish assessed the actual effect in terms of propositional accuracy gains ("fidelity") and in terms of autonomous output quality. The findings serve as input for further improvement of the training programme.

Kerstin Kunz, Sara Castagnoli and Natalie Kübler describe an e-learning course on the use of corpora for translation targeting both professional translators and trainees, which is designed to give vocational training in the application of new technologies such as Translation Memories, Markup Languages, Machine Translation and Corpora which span activities going from traditional translation to localization, terminology management, information management and project management. This course was developed by the EU-funded MELLANGE project which, according to the authors, fills a gap associated with the lack of awareness by translators of corpora and associated technologies.

From within the ranks of Translation Studies, it has often been claimed that investigating translation-related phenomena has something to offer to other disciplines which address language and communication problems. Psychology and more specifically psycholinguistics has been interested in the cognitive development of bilinguals. Caroline Lehr reports on a study in which linguists submit translation students to a German and French lexical decision task, the purpose being to investigate linguistic data processing in bilinguals. She elaborates on further prospects for the extension of interdisciplinary cooperation between psychology and Translation Studies.



Agnieszka Chmiel follows a similar line, starting with the import of concepts and theories from cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics, more specifically ideas about the mental lexicon and about memory. While Lehr refers to the contribution translators can make to psycholinguists, Chmiel focuses on interpreting. She introduces her longitudinal project aimed at developing effective aptitude tests for interpreter training programs on the basis of cognitive factors. She reports on two pilot studies, one on the processing of cognates and the other on semantic verbal fluency, and suggests that further studies might put to good use potential synergy between Interpreting Studies and psycholinguistics.

Barbara Ahrens, Eliza Kalderon, Christoph Krick and Wolfgang Reith are engaged in neurophysiological studies of the human brain using functional magnetic resonance imaging. Again, they are interested in the particular bilingualism of conference interpreters which they compare to foreign language students and to students who have little contact with foreign languages, and examine activation patterns in the brain during language switching operations in the three groups. In the study reported here, they looked at the applicability of fMRI in studying the relative activity of various parts of the brain during simultaneous interpreting vs. free speech production. They view their findings as a suitable starting point for further exploration about the evolution of brain activity and structures over the interpreters' career.

The last paper in this volume takes a deliberately conservative view but offers an optimistic conclusion. Daniel Gile challenges the idea that TS takes no interest in the practitioners' needs. He concedes that its "scientific" contribution to the practice of Translation is difficult to measure – one might note in this respect that most contributions about the scientific effects of TS included in this volume relate to prospects rather than to achievements, but argues that its contribution to Translator training is already felt in the field. The paper ends with a comment: some authors may argue that TS is an epistemological requirement for translators and interpreters and helps address various aspects of society, of language, of translator training, of cognitive processes, but perhaps the community of practitioners could be reminded that TS as an academic discipline also has a role to play in defending and sometimes raising the Translators' social status.

The editors

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**Does TS matter?**



# Why interpreting studies matters

Franz Pöchhacker

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This paper takes up the theme of the Ljubljana EST Congress from the perspective of interpreting studies. The basic assumption that the existence of a distinct research community dedicated to the study of interpreting corresponds to an epistemological need is illustrated with regard to related work in psychology and sociology. On the assumption that the research output of interpreting scholars needs a 'market', interpreter education, professional practice, and institutional user contexts are examined as domains for which interpreting studies might matter. With special emphasis on community settings, the potential of interpreting research to shape social practices in relevant institutional contexts is discussed with reference to recent examples. Given the obstacles to interdisciplinary publication and impact, it is suggested that interpreting scholars need to invest also in 'D' (development) rather than 'R' if they wish their findings to matter to those who shape the social practices in which (community-based) interpreting is embedded.

**Keywords:** discipline, sociology, epistemology, needs, social usefulness

## 1. Introduction

In response to the challenge posed by the theme of the EST Congress in Ljubljana, my aim in this paper is to consider why interpreting studies as a (sub)discipline, and the research produced by scholars affiliated with it, could be said to matter, and to whom. My fundamental assumption, that the existence of a distinct research community dedicated to the study of interpreting corresponds to an epistemological need, will be argued from a historical perspective, using examples from such more established disciplines as psychology and sociology to illustrate how interpreting used to be seen and studied – or not. Moving on to the idea that research output also needs a 'market', I will discuss in more detail *to whom* interpreting studies might matter, referring to such major domains as interpreter education, professional practice, and institutional (user) contexts. In particular, I will examine the claim that research on community-based interpreting addresses a social need and could therefore be said to be (more) 'socially

useful'. Using some recent examples, I will show how this may well be the case but, at the same time, point to some serious limitations in the capacity of interpreting research to matter quite enough.

## 2. A 'science' for interpreting

My first and fundamental point is obvious enough: Interpreting studies as a scientific discipline – that is, a field within academia, a community whose members are engaged in creating (more) knowledge about their object of study by working according to what is broadly (though not uncontroversially) defined as the 'scientific method' – matters because it meets an epistemological need: ours is the only scholarly community that claims and takes charge of interpreting as its object of study.

This amounts to saying that we exist because we have a unique object of study, and that we matter because we exist. Quite so! It matters that there is a scientific community for the study of interpreting as a distinct phenomenon – on the assumption that human society maintains a consensus that the 'web of science' should be woven as densely as possible. In our day and age, this consensus is largely taken for granted, but one need only to recall, say, China's Cultural Revolution to realize that scientific endeavor as a social value is itself a social construction. But if this consensus holds, and if ever more knowledge is to be created about as many phenomena as possible, then interpreting studies simply has its *raison d'être* as a branch, or twig, of science. That is our function, our use to society: we 'see' – and study – things that others don't.

### 2.1 Seen by psychologists

The issue of seeing interpreting as an object of study – or not – can be illustrated with reference to early research on interpreting from the vantage points of more established disciplines. Interpreting studies as such did not exist in the 1960s, so research on interpreting was done within other paradigms, mainly psychology and psycholinguistics. And that research, by people like Frieda Goldman-Eisler and David Gerver, did matter: interpreter subjects provided Goldman-Eisler with a rich source of spontaneous speech output to be examined for pauses and thus for indicators of cognitive processing activity (e.g. Goldman-Eisler 1967); and Gerver was able to use his analysis of the task of simultaneous interpreting (SI) to propose a new conceptualization of the human cognitive processor, replacing the assumption of a fixed processing channel for one cognitive task only by that of a "fixed-capacity central processor", whose activity could be distributed over several tasks within the limits of the total processing capacity available (Gerver 1971: 15f). Interpreting, and research on it, clearly mattered – to psychologists. Even the pioneering work of my Viennese colleague Ingrid Kurz, then Pinter, is an example of that phenomenon. Having been trained as an interpreter and

at the same time worked on a degree in psychology, she devoted her doctoral thesis in psychology (Pinter 1969) to demonstrating what she knew from immediate experience, i.e. that it was in fact possible to learn to listen and speak at the same time. She took her cue from no less an authority in psychology than Donald Broadbent, one of the pioneers of cognitive psychology, whose study of flight control communication in pilots had led him to the conclusion that “the saying of even a simple series of words interferes with the understanding of a fresh message” (1952: 271).

This example hints at what may be gained by viewing one’s object of study from different intellectual (theoretical and experiential) premises. But it is still an example of the normal workings of the scientific process, within a given scientific community, in this case, psychology.

Some members of that scientific community, after it had fully embraced the ‘cognitive turn’, maintained an interest in interpreting; others did not. The most prominent example of the latter is pioneer time-lag researcher Pierre Oléron, who, in a 1992 autobiographical essay, referred to his 1965 study with Nanpon as “une sorte d’aberration” (...) une sorte de contre-exemple par rapport aux recherches ‘normales’” (1992: 153).

A prominent example of psychologists holding the opposite view is Giovanni Flores d’Arcais, who, in his contribution to the 1977 Venice Symposium, described (simultaneous) interpreting as ideally suited for psychological experiments:

[...] there are probably very few “real-life” situations which are more similar to a laboratory of psychological experimentation than the situation of the interpreter in a conference booth, both for the control of external variables and for the “artificiality” of the task in comparison to normal linguistic performance. (Flores d’Arcais 1978: 393)

Note that the focus of psychological interest is simultaneous conference interpreting as practiced in a booth. With the exception of some comparative work by Gerver, consecutive interpreting, which after all involves a formidable memory task, at least in its ‘classic’ form as practiced since the 1920s, was not seen by experimental psychologists as a phenomenon worth studying.

Two issues emerge quite clearly from this brief review of the way influential psychologists related to interpreting: one is sustaining interest in interpreting as an object of study, and the other is defining that object in the first place. In either case, the underlying attitude could be summarized as “We study what we are interested in!” or “We study what matters to us!”

The example of early research on interpreting by psychologists cuts both ways: on the one hand, interpreting was at least seen as an object of study (and interpreting studies owes significant initial input to those psychologists of the 1960s and 1970s); on the other hand, it was viewed very narrowly, leaving much of the phenomenon unexplored. Oléron, for instance, had published on deaf education since the late 1940s but showed no awareness of, or interest in, signed language interpreting. And as even consecutive interpreters’ feats of memory did not attract the attention of cognitive scientists, it is



not surprising that the more mundane forms of interpreting remained ignored and unseen. And not only by psychologists, as the following example will show.

## 2.2 Seen by sociologists – or not

As early as the 1970s, one of the most accomplished and inspiring representatives of the field of sociology, Aaron Cicourel, was doing pioneering work on language in medicine. In a review article published in 1981, he discussed two medical interviews from his own empirical work. One of them involves a 15-year-old Mexican boy suspected of suffering from epilepsy. The patient is accompanied by his mother and uncle, with the latter serving as ad hoc interpreter for the former. The uncle's command of English is quite limited, however, so the interview proceeds with great difficulty. This is demonstrated in Cicourel's transcript, where the uncle is unable to render the Spanish term "sarampión" and is in fact assisted by the researcher, presumably Cicourel himself, who is fluent in Spanish. The researcher is thus directly aware of the issue of translation and of the ad hoc interpreter's insufficient competence.

Here is a brief excerpt, adapted from Cicourel (1981: 424f), to illustrate what we now know are typical features of ad hoc interpreters' performance, such as reduced renditions and an active third-party approach to the task.

- (18) D: Was it the three-day or ten-day measles?  
 (19) U: ¿No te acuerdas cuánto te duró? ¿Tres días o diez días?  
*Do you remember how long it lasted? Three days or ten days?*  
 ...  
 (27) U: Duró mucho tiempo?  
*Did it last a long time?*  
 (28) M: Y dijo el doctor que si no me quitaba la fiebra me moría yo y (U: uh huh)  
*And the doctor said that if I couldn't get rid of the fever I would die and*  
*Que me vi mal (a?) con el sarampión.*  
*That I (saw myself?) was (really) sick with the measles.*  
 (29) U: Sí pero. she feel. sick through that time.  
*Yes but.*

The doctor's question (18) is rendered by the Uncle in a somewhat more personal style (19) and taken up again several turns later, after the Mother had failed to give a precise answer. The Mother again describes her illness rather than specifying its duration (28), and the Uncle reconsiders his urge to press her for an answer ("Yes, but...") and renders her utterance with considerable abridgment.

And yet, what looks like an early example of discourse-based research on interpreting in healthcare is not about interpreting at all. Cicourel is particularly interested in the written record of the interview and, from this perspective, concludes that nothing is said in the medical report about the difficulties of conducting the interview and